

# TOW Conservation Commission

## Meeting Notes

Meeting of 02/27/06

### Begin

7:35 pm

### Attending

- Salvatore LaBruna
- Claude Braithwaite – Not attending
- Patricia Owen
- Jon Paul Heurich
- Kevin Sumner
- Mike Leary
- Kate Fox

### Review of Previous Meeting Notes

- Minutes were handed out and read individually. Nominated for approval by Jon Paul. Seconded by Kate.

### Official Business

Presentation by Karen Strong with NYS DEC and the Hudson River Estuary Program.

- Our questions / comments during introduction
  - How to organize and how to use the information?
  - How to satisfy business / development potential while still preserving natural resources?
  - How to gather and use already existing information?
  - Grant will help us focus on getting resource completed.
  - Not having a natural resources inventory (NRI) was a hindrance to the Master Plan Committee.
    - They needed additional information and it either wasn't available or couldn't be located because was not collected and catalogued.
    - Some towns don't consider a master plan without a natural resource inventory.

Karen's Presentation

- Collecting and cataloging existing information is probably the most important task that we can undertake immediately.
- What is considered "natural resources"?
  - Handout of Dutchess County natural resource inventory to help explain.
- What is "open space"?
  - Karen's favorite definition is "land that is not specially developed"?
  - We need to define ourselves.
- It is not "smart growth" / "good growth" if growth does not preserve natural resources also.

- It is important in our NRI to define not only what natural resources are, but also why they are important.
  - Need natural resources for cleaner water, air, sense of community, someplace to go besides the mall, etc.
- By collecting information and creating an overlay map we can create a better overview of the town and identify which areas are most important to protect, where we should put our energy / funds.
- Karen handed out a draft of statements that could be put into the master plans.
- Karen handed out list of rare and/or declining species in the town.
- Karen handed out a chapter 4 of a book titled “Biodiversity in the Hudson Valley II” which explains how to find and use biological information.
- What is the best format for the information?
  - GIS is best if we have expertise and access to software.
    - We currently don’t have either.
  - Paper is the only other option but it is not preferred because it not updateable.
  - Both the DEC and the county offer free training.
  - Most used is “ESRI.com”.
    - They have grant programs also.
    - Kevin thinks that there are lower end simpler packages because we don’t really need analysis, just mapping and inventory control.
  - This information is useful beyond the committee for other agencies in the town, so it is possible that we could get the town to contribute either money or personnel.
  - GIS based information is also more useful to the town’s residents so that we can get their input and comments.
    - Good way to get difficult to find information into a form that others can work with.
  - The Orange County open space plan is also a good starting point for a GIS based inventory.
    - However, we will need more granularity so not something we can simply duplicate, but a good place to start.
- Inventory and list high quality habitat first.
  - These are the areas that are most immediately in need of protection and most likely to be irrevocably damaged if not protected.
  - Look for areas that contain rare animals, plants, etc.
  - Karen handed out a list of species that are indicative of high quality habitat.
  - As high quality habitat is identified a “landscape” of areas to concentrate on preservation will emerge.
  - Gets the issue out in front of the developers in the beginning before they do too much work.
  - Karen still recommends site specific assessment for individual site plans, even if they aren’t in the known high quality habitat areas.
  - Karen recommends adding evaluation guideline language to the SEQR process for the town.
    - Done in some town’s and seems to be effective.
    - Could also do as an ordinance, but this is usually more difficult.

- If we do suspect that listed species reside in some areas then we need to informed DEC and/or other appropriate agencies also as they may provide better protection methods than the town's methods.
- Handed out map from NYS Natural Heritage Program.
  - Map of not only where the species lives, but also areas around the habitat that needs protected to sustain the habitat.
  - Dark green – important river community, most the Shawangunk.
  - Big yellow / orange circular blobs are Indiana bat habitat.
    - Core circles surround a roost, larger circle is feeding area.
    - Summer maternity colonies are in our area.
    - The bats roost in any shaggy bark trees and especially shag bark hickory. Sometimes even under shingles on houses.
    - Any proposed development in those areas need to contact Fish and Wildlife before developing.
    - This information is all brand new, so the guidelines are not clear at this point.
    - Once things are better understood then we should have a representative from Fish and Wildlife in for an education seminar.
    - The bat habitat won't necessarily prevent development, but it may mean modification to the development plan to preserve specific trees and may prevent tree cutting during certain times of the year.
  - Dark brown are protected area, parks, etc.
  - Small lighter yellow blob is the Prothonotary Warbler.
    - Not current a listed bird, but very rare and will likely be listed in the future.
- Karen handed out a map copied from the Breeding Bird Atlas.
  - Volunteers divided areas into blocks and inventoried.
  - Each block has a list of all birds identified in area.
  - Start with threatened and listed birds for our inventory.
- The Audubon Society of NYS just produced a book on NYS birds.
  - Karen handed out a list from the book identifying type of habitat of different listed birds.
- Sources for reptiles and amphibians.
  - NYS R&A Atlas.
  - NYS website has also distribution maps.
  - Karen hands out specific data for the town.
  - Same concept as for protected birds, i.e. narrow the list to important species and use their locations to identify high quality habitat.
- All these maps and lists indicated “presence” only.
  - Just because it isn't listed doesn't mean that it isn't there.
- Question: How much of our grant should be utilized on consultants?
  - Karen recommends that we try to do as much of the “leg work” as we can ourselves to maximize use of the funding.
  - Consults are best used for assistance with converting information into common formats for overlays and other technical tasks.
  - Kevin suggests that the best use of the money is for computers, software, quality printers, etc.

- Karen hands out a report from the Wildlife Conservation Society for Goshen, Chester and Warwick.
  - Shows areas that may be appropriate for special protection.
- We can, and should, call Karen, or her replacement while she is on maternity leave, with additional questions.
- Karen says that we can start the "match clock" (labor we invest towards the matching funds requirement of the grant) once the acknowledgement letter is received, even before the contract is received.
- Karen says this contract process moves faster than most and we should receive the funding in 2-3 months.
- Her organization partners with Hudsonia for various length courses that teach us how to do our own biodiversity maps.
- How should we get the public involved?
  - Organize volunteers.
  - Public meeting, either for the whole town or on a ward by ward basis.
  - Often at the meetings will find some highly skilled people who could be helpful with specific parts of the inventory.
- DEC wildlife 256-3098.

### **Future Projects**

- Tree cover – Mike will investigate / spearhead.
- Sidewalks – Sal will investigate / spearhead.
- Reduction of pollutants in storm water runoff
- Pace on-line course for land use. Everyone should complete.

### **Adjourned**

Motion to adjourn by Mike. Seconded by Pat. 9:30.

### **Copies:**

- Mike – 7 copies of 3 page meeting notes.
- Sal – Did not make an Agenda this week because it was expected that the Karen visit would consume the entire meeting time.
- Sal also made several copies of documents for town officials, but didn't have an exact count at this time.